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NSC BRIEFING

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THE COMMUNIST THREAT TO IRAQ

1. The Communists have been moving aggressively since the abortive Mosul revolt on 7-8 March, and their influence now permeates all levels and activities in Iraq.
 - A. Although Communist Party membership is estimated to be only about 10,000 (it may grow to 20-30,000 if the leaders keep membership lists open), its real strength lies in the strategic positions now occupied by Communist or pro-Communist figures, e.g.:
 1. Commanding Officer, Iraqi Air Force - Col. Jamal Awqati
 2. Acting Deputy Chief of Staff, Operations, Iraqi Army - Brig. Farid Rihab Mahmud
 3. Minister of Economy - Dr. Ibrahim Kubba
 4. Minister of Health - Maj. Gen. Muhammad Siddiq Shawwal
 5. Director General of Broadcasting - Salim Fakhri
 6. Director General of Higher Education - Dr. Faysal Jari al-Samir
 7. Prime Minister's aide de camp - Col. Wasfi Tahir
 - B. Question still exists as to whether Qasim himself is a Communist; some reports have asserted that he is or was, but we tend to believe that he is probably not a party member. He has permitted a situation to develop, however, in which the Communists could probably nullify any attempt by Qasim to take action against them.

- II. In the army, there are persistent reports of Communist gains among non-commissioned officers while anti-Communist officers have been removed from their commands, transferred, or arrested on grounds of anti-regime activities.
- A. New army units being formed by Qasim and armed with Soviet Bloc equipment will at least reduce potential for anti-regime activity by other units even if they do not form positive asset for Communists.
 - B. Communist-controlled Popular Resistance Force, estimated to have as many as 50,000 members, is receiving arms, ostensibly for training and guard duty. Although nominally under army authority, PRF operates increasingly as semi-autonomous group and its activities are expanding.
- III. Internal dissemination of information is now almost totally under Communist control.
- A. Radio Baghdad, under a Communist director, is used to broadcast Communist-inspired "popular demands" for action by Qasim.
 - B. Nearly all non-Communist newspapers deliberately destroyed by mob action at time of Mosul revolt.
 - C. Proliferating "mass organizations" provide channel for getting Communist line to labor, student, women's groups, and are used, together with "street," to produce demonstrations on demand. Current example of this kind of mobilization is Peace Partisans' "rally" which addressed by Qasim on 14 April and to which "Red Dean" of Canterbury and Paul Robeson invited.

- IV. Nasser's vigorous attacks on Qasim and his Soviet and Communist backers have almost certainly intensified Qasim's fears for the safety of his regime and increased his dependence on the USSR.
- A. Communist Bloc leaders have thereby been aided in achieving their initial goal of establishing close ties with Qasim.
 - B. While the USSR is eager to maintain a pre-emptive position in Iraq, it seems unlikely that the Kremlin wishes to promote a Communist coup in Baghdad at this stage, since such a development would affect adversely Soviet goals in other Asian-African countries.
 - 1. Top Soviet figures have displayed confidence that the Middle East will eventually fall under Communist control, but they have shown they feel this is going to be a fairly long process.
 - C. Although the local Communists will soon, if they do not already, possess the ability to assume effective control in Iraq, we believe they will prefer for some time not to assert their power openly. However, a shift in Soviet policy of the development of a combination of internal and external pressures which might lead Qasim to seek to reduce Communist influence might well lead the local Communists to feel they could not afford to wait.